

Younger teens seen getting into violent crime



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by **James Lynch**

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SEATTLE — The latest incident happened at the West Ridge Park Apartments at Delridge Way SW and SW Kenyon Street.

It was 11:30 p.m. Monday and the homeowners reported hearing someone inside their apartment.

They found two 13-year-old boys carrying flashlights.



After a brief confrontation, the boys ran away with some small electronics. They were caught and arrested a short time later.

“We haven’t seen any measurable increase in juvenile crime in general. We have seen a definite uptick in these high-profile serious, violent crimes, which is concerning, of course,” Pierce County prosecutor Mark Lindquist said.

And it’s happening all over Western Washington.

In Everett, young teens are believed responsible for three armed robberies.

A 12-year-old boy points his pistol at a clerk at Pecks Drive Market on Aug. 28. Then, less than a week later, investigators say the same kid held up the Hillbilly Hotties Coffee stand on Hoyt Avenue.

“He rode up on his bicycle, ordered some coffee. At 12-years-old, he orders coffee. When the victim in this case told him how much it was, he reached into his backpack and pulled out the firearm at that time and demanded the money,” Everett Police Department spokesman Aaron Snell said.

Surveillance video helped cops catch up with that child who told them he borrowed the gun from a 16-year-old friend; the same guy was caught on tape in late July robbing a Jimmie Johns shop.

Finally, in Seattle, a 13-year-old boy faces robbery and assault charges for the July 18 attack on a security guard at Westlake Park. According to court documents, a group of young men beat the guard unconscious. The 13-year-old then allegedly kicked the guard several times in the head and tried to steal his wallet.

The same boy is also believed responsible for another assault and robbery on Aug. 18 near Third and Pine.

“The younger the intervention comes, the better. You want to get these kids back on the straight and narrow before they get into the heavy-duty violent crime,” Lindquist said.

And that’s what’s happening in King County, where voters recently approved a \$210 million levy to rebuild the entire Youth Services Center, which houses the juvenile detention center, a jail and courtrooms.

“It will measurably improve the quality of justice. It will provide the kind of facility that is required for doing this kind of work,” King County Superior Court Judge Bruce Hilyer said.

Experts say any steps taken by the state to help youngsters are steps in the right direction, but those on the front lines say the real solution starts long before kids get into trouble.

“While the criminal justice system is focused on rehabilitation, as it should be, you can’t expect the juvenile justice system to do everything. A lot of this falls on the parents and on the community,” Lindquist said.

Lindquist added that whether it’s neighbors, church groups or civic organizations, early intervention is crucial to keep kids out of the criminal justice system.